

AN ORAL HISTORY OF OVERHILLS:

A BYGONE HUNT CLUB, COUNTRY ESTATE, AND COMMUNITY IN THE SANDHILLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Overhills Oral History Project began with an ambition and a legal mandate. The U.S. Army purchased the old private country club and Rockefeller estate in 1997. The land would become critically-needed training area and, in lieu of preservation, the Army initiated an intensive documentation effort focused on the unique history of the property. The historic buildings and landscape were recorded. Now the story of Overhills is being chronicled through the perspective of oral history. One final objective is an interesting, educational and interactive exhibit for the general public.

A COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH

Overhills was a geographic community with an eclectic social composition and unique organizational nexus in its status as a private family estate. Since Overhills is now abandoned, an effective way to appreciate the diversity of life experience is through the perspective of those who knew it best. The Overhills community consists of a heterogeneous collection of people who worked and lived on the estate and the more privileged owners and their guests, who visited seasonally. All interacted to support and define Overhills, and in interviews their individual voices reveal distinctive lives with many common threads.

A SENSE OF PLACE

As an assembly of buildings and landscape features scattered over thousands of acres, Overhills held an overall rural character with distinctive land use areas reflective of its unique past. At the heart of the estate stood the lodges, golf course, riding stables, and railroad tracks that formed the core of the old country club. Pine forest covered much of the property and insulated hundreds of miles of sand roads, bridle trails, a lake, tenant farms, pea patches, workers' cottages, a train station and an old nursery complex. A private setting with deep historic roots and continuity of use over multiple generations of estate owners and employees, Overhills maintained a strong sense of place.

A NARRATED TOUR

The Overhills Oral History Project will provide an opportunity for viewers to reconstruct and interpret Overhills as a community and place. Oral histories add names and personal experience to a distinctive landscape and built environment illustrated in maps and photographs. Characters come alive in memories. Static fields, barns, and cottages are embellished with activity. The evolution of the estate is conveyed through individual perspectives from different periods of time.

ORAL HISTORY IN A FOUR PART, INTERACTIVE, MULTIMEDIA FORMAT



Oh I wish you could have seen it. You went in through the back of the house and the office was on the right hand side. They had teletype back then. That was right on the right side. And then beyond that was the big dining room and then beyond that was the kitchen. Then you would go in, you would go to the left and the front of the Clubhouse overlooked of course the golf course. There was a big room there and they had a huge hewn out log right in front of the fireplace because they liked everything natural back then. So they had the log and this gigantic fireplace and right up over it was a moose head. It was this huge moose head. It was kind of intimidating when it was lightning and thundering. That's why it reminded me of that hotel in The Shining. Then the other rooms had deer heads and all kinds of heads, especially over the door. Then when it would be thunder and lightning and the building would shake and the shutters and everything. It was just like, gadzooks!
-Dorothy Yantis

Well they didn't have a high school. We went to the Nursery, which was about five miles and we went on horse and covered wagon. And we went over there and built a stable and they would haul hay and feed over there and put it out. We'd drive the wagon over there, had it covered, a little covered wagon with a small sided wagon. Hauled about 12, 14, 15 kids. Had two seats, each seat along each side.
-Andrew Jackson Sr.

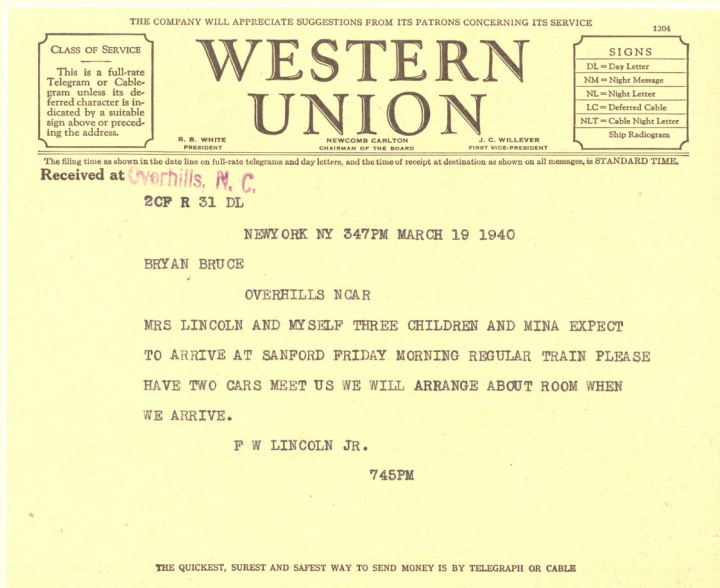
I can remember fox hunting when I was young. I remember I'd go down with my grandmother and we'd watch them all go off early in the morning, which was kind of exciting. So that would have been, well the early '30s. And as you know my grandmother built her house in '29 for the grandchildren and then my grandfather had the Covert for his friends, fox hunting friends. And then behind the Covert was Mr. Alabaster's house. He was the butler or something like that. And the inn was there. The inn was there and going when I was a small child with lots of people there.
-Isabel Elmer

Stories and descriptions of Overhills (extracted audio clips) organized by topics. The viewer can listen while simultaneously viewing images.

IMAGES



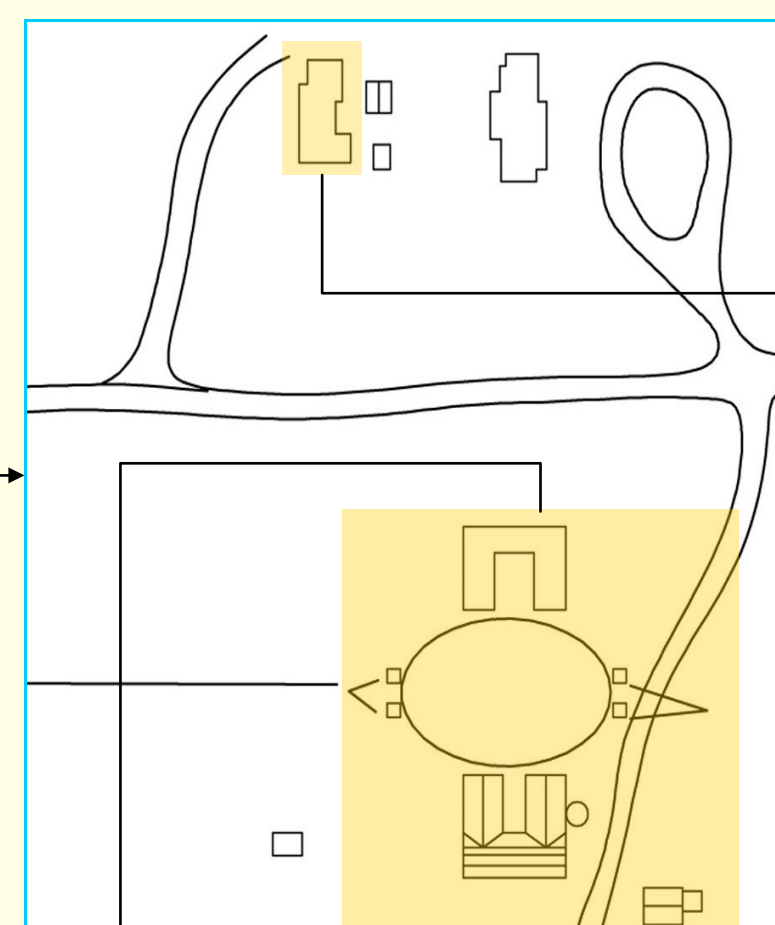
Photographs and archived documents from the 1920s-1990s, organized by topics.



STORIES

As far as our family or the guests or something going down, it was the staff that made Overhills because you were truly loved unconditionally. It doesn't matter what I would do or say or look like or have friends. I was Isabel and Freddy's daughter, Posy. I am totally adored as are my children.
-Florence Short

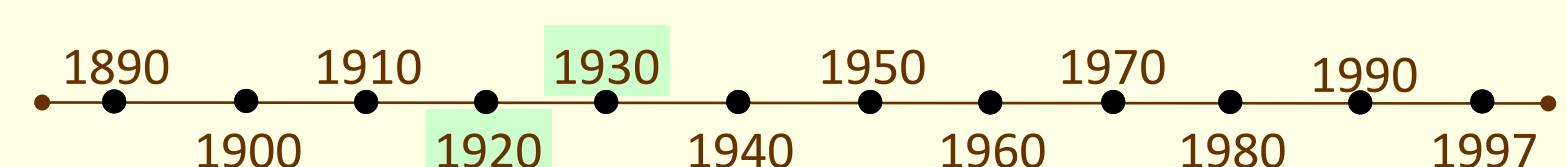
MAPS



October 2008

A brief narrative history of Overhills based on archival research and oral history, organized in a timeline by decades.

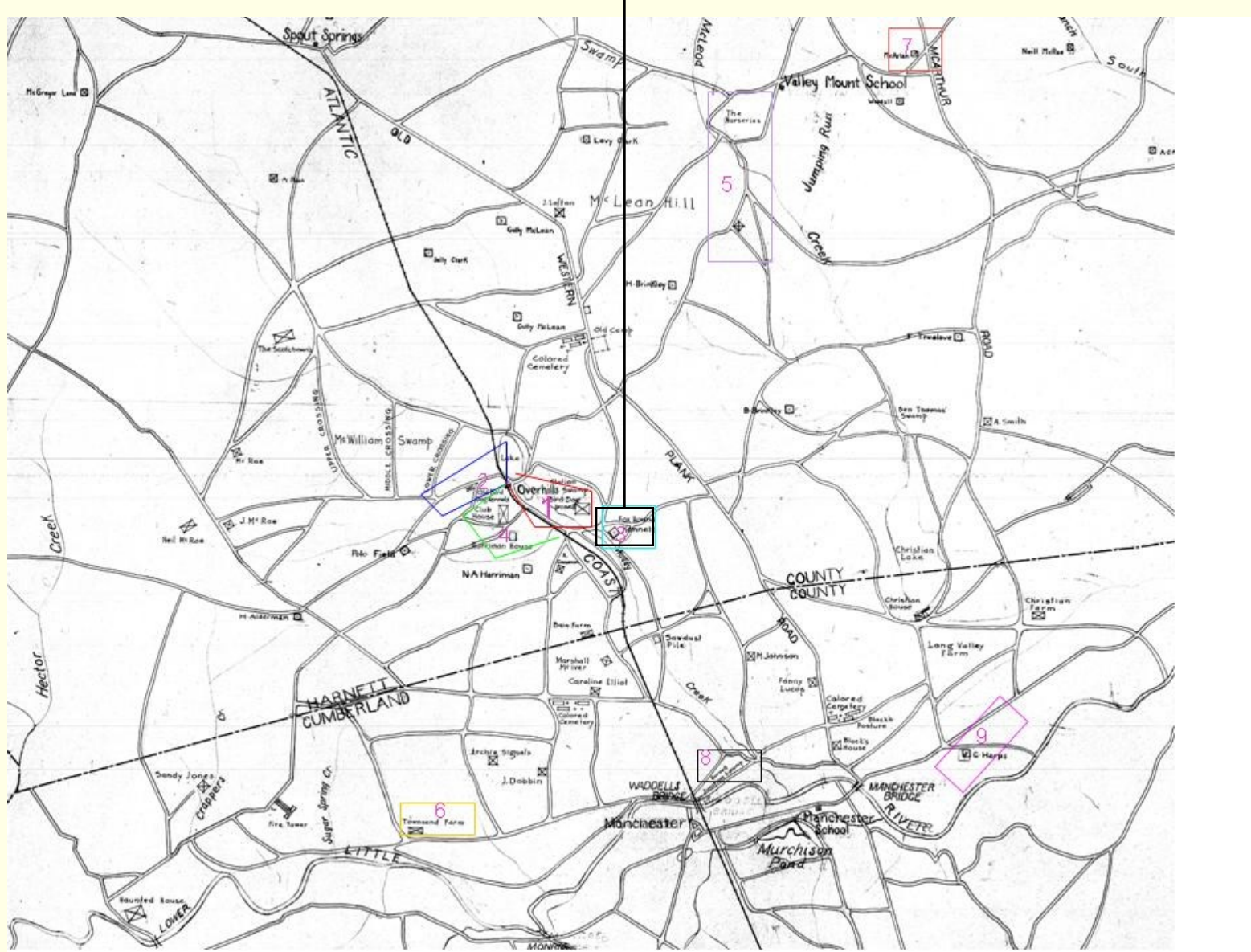
INFORMATION



1920-1930

With a small group of shareholders, Percy Rockefeller and William A. Harriman form the Overhills Land Company, which acquires all lands, over 20,000 acres, and other property of the Kent-Jordan Company. The 1920s are banner years at Overhills, in its heyday as a country club for an ensemble of some of the wealthiest capitalists, industrialists and financiers in the nation. The club comprised a small group of shareholders who visit the estate each winter with their friends and families. A bird hunting shooting syndicate is formed. Fox hunting gains a new formality at the hand of Percy Rockefeller, who builds an elaborate hunt complex with stables and kennels. Harriman converts the farm barn into a polo pony stable and builds a polo field along the 15th fairway of the golf course. Golf, tennis and horseback riding offer recreational activities. Construction increases dramatically to include club member cottages (Covert, Croatan), a dairy, post office, employee houses, and the hunt complex. Guests travel by rail overnight from New York, trunks in tow. Percy Rockefeller gains controlling interest of the estate and emerges as a leading figure in growth and development. Captain Frank Miller, polo pony trainer for Harriman, becomes superintendent. In 1930, the estate encompasses some 40,000 acres of land.

Interactive Map Layers:
1. Overhills Base Map
2. Area Map
3. Buildings



TOPICS EXPLORED

With overarching concepts of community and sense of place and a mission to document Overhills, interviews explored a range of topics related to the estate:

- Recreation (*Golf, Hunting, Horseback Riding, Polo, Tennis*)
- Architecture (*Clubhouse, Cottages, Stables, Barns, RR Station*)
- Preventorium and Lindley Nursery
- Places (*Estate Layout, Roads, Landmarks, Railroad*)
- Agriculture (*Tenant Farming, Livestock*)
- Daily Life (*Anecdotes, Church, School, Holidays, Work, Meals, Children's Playtime*)
- People (*Influential Figures, Rockefellers, Employees*)
- Defining Overhills (*What was and Where was Overhills?*)
- Coming to Overhills (*Seasonal Visits and Activities*)
- History and Organization of Overhills

TECHNOLOGY AND ORAL HISTORY

Flash® Media software provides an excellent multimedia format for presentation and contextualization of oral history. Our final product, to be designed and built by Lockheed Martin, will combine a minimum of 100 images and 100 minutes of audio in an interactive, dynamic arrangement. The program will allow the viewer to listen to stories about and descriptions of Overhills while studying high resolution photographs, documents, and maps. The viewer may discover associations between places, landmarks, buildings, and narratives in a compelling visual exhibit. A set of interactive maps and photographs will facilitate a geographic orientation to Overhills, enhancing the viewer's sense of place.

PROJECT STATISTICS

# of Interviewees	46
Hours of Recording	75
Transcription Pages	1600
Age Range of Interviewees	50—90
# of Rockefeller Descendants	8
# of Employees	28
# of Other	10

Narrators' years of experience at Overhills range from the 1920s to the 1990s.

